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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses research on the English of Mexican Americans, arguing that in focusing primarily on description of vernacular Chicano English, the literature describing English spoken by Mexican Americans presents an incomplete picture of the complexity of their linguistic situation. Researchers may lose sight of the range of linguistic behaviors found within the Mexican American community, or even within a single family, where it is not uncommon to find fluent Spanish speakers, speakers with limited Spanish proficiency, and speakers of both nonstandard and standard dialects of English. The paper examines the range of linguistic behaviors found within three generations of a primarily English-dominant, middle class Mexican American family. It finds that even within this close-knit group of speakers, there exist distinct linguistic norms, ranging from those associated more closely with Chicano English to those associated with standard English. Even those speakers who make use of few if any linguistic resources associated with Chicano English or Spanish distinguish themselves linguistically from non-Mexican Americans. The paper considers the conscious and unconscious linguistic choices made by the speakers to be acts of identity, suggesting that the linguistic behaviors described are important means of constructing aspects of their social identities. (Contains 20 references.) (SM)

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RE-EXAMINING THE ENGLISH OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

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Re-Examining the English of Mexican Americans

1. Introduction

The linguistic situation of Mexican Americans, like that of other Hispanic Americans, is quite complex. As noted, for example, by Baugh (1984) and Santa Ana (1993), the linguistic situation of Mexican Americans is in some ways more complex than that of other, monolingual, ethnic minority groups in the United States, such as African Americans, because it involves the presence of two languages, English and Spanish, in addition to dialect variation within each. In their discussions of Mexican American language, researchers have tended to focus on four main areas: listeners' attitudes toward standard and non-standard dialects of English and Spanish (e.g., Ramírez 1981; Ryan and Carranza 1977), the description of non-standard dialects of Spanish (e.g., Garcia 1975; Lance 1975), codeswitching between Spanish and English (e.g., Elías-Olivares 1976; Valdés 1988), and the vernacular English dialect spoken mainly by working-class Mexican Americans living in predominantly Mexican American neighborhoods (e.g., Bayley 1994; Fought 1997; Mendoza-Denton

1997; Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia 1984), often referred to as "Chicano English."

Most of the studies concerning the English of Mexican Americans that have appeared in recent years have focused on the description of linguistic aspects of "Vernacular Chicano English" and on the question of whether or not "Chicano English" is an autonomous dialect of American English, as opposed to a non-native variety of English reflecting interference from Spanish. These are clearly important descriptive and theoretical issues. However, in this paper I argue that in focusing primarily on the description of "Vernacular Chicano English," the literature describing the English spoken by Mexican Americans presents an incomplete picture of the complexity of their linguistic situation. Specifically, I argue that in focusing primarily on the description of "Vernacular Chicano English" and on those Mexican Americans who speak "Vernacular Chicano English," we sometimes lose sight of the range of linguistic behaviors found within the Mexican American community, or even within a single family. Within a single family, for example, it is not uncommon to find fluent Spanish speakers, speakers with limited Spanish proficiency, and speakers of both nonstandard and standard dialects of English.

In this paper, I examine the range of linguistic behaviors found within three generations of a primarily English-dominant, middle-class Mexican American family. I find that even within this close-knit group of speakers, there exist distinct linguistic norms, ranging from those associated more closely with "Chicano English" to those associated more closely with "Standard English" and that individual speakers differ as to how closely they approximate these norms. Furthermore, I find that even those speakers who make use of few if any linguistic resources associated with "Chicano English" or "Spanish" nevertheless distinguish themselves linguistically from non-Mexican Americans. Following Le Page (1980) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), I consider the conscious and unconscious linguistic choices made by the speakers in my study to be "acts of identity," and the linguistic behaviors I describe to be an important means by which they construct aspects of their social identities.

2. My Study: Data and Subjects

The data I analyze in this paper come from an on-going study examining various aspects of the language use of eight members of a Mexican American family from El Paso, Texas. The

subjects include three grandparents, two parents, and their three children. The data consist of approximately fourteen hours of audiotaped conversations recorded between 1997 and 1999 in El Paso and Austin, Texas, supplemented by participant observation. The tapes consist of conversations between family members and, in some instances, other relatives or close friends who were not part of the study. In many cases, I was one of the participants in the conversations. During the time I was recording the conversations, the grandparents were in their late sixties to mid-seventies, the parents were in their early fifties, and the children were in their mid- to late-twenties, early twenties, and pre- to early teens, respectively. The codes I use to identify my subjects, their generation, and their approximate ages are given in the table in (1).

(1) Subjects

Subject	Generation	Age
G1	Grandmother	early 70s
G2	Grandmother	late 60s to early 70s
G3	Grandfather	mid 70s
P1	Mother	early 50s
P2	Father	early 50s
C1	Son	mid to late 20s
C2	Son	early 20s
C3	Daughter	pre- to early teens

As mentioned earlier, I consider this family to be, at this point in time, English-dominant. That is, English appears to be the main language used in interactions between immediate family members, often with a good deal of codeswitching between certain family members, such as the parents and grandparents. The grandparents are native speakers of Spanish and are fluent in both Spanish and English. They could be described as speakers of "Chicano English," based on the description provided by Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia (1985).[3] However, as their native language is Spanish rather than English, some researchers would probably consider them to be speakers of an "interlanguage" English instead (e.g., Santa Ana 1993:23). The parents are natively fluent speakers of both Spanish and English. They speak mostly in English to their children, and most observers would probably consider them to be speakers of "Standard English." By this I mean that they speak a variety of what most of us would consider to be "Standard American English," with some regional features and without any obvious influence from Spanish. The children are native speakers

[3] Like most of the other members of the family, the grandparents speak a non-standard dialect of Spanish. However, as the varieties of Spanish spoken within this family are not the focus of my study, I do not discuss them further in this paper.

of English and, while they speak some Spanish, are clearly more comfortable speaking in English. Like the parents, most observers would probably consider them to be speakers of "Standard English."

3. Analysis

In order to better understand the range of linguistic behaviors found within this family, I examined three aspects of the family members' language use which can be said to be associated with Mexican American identity: codeswitching, or the alternation between Spanish and English within a single conversation or turn at talk, the pronunciation of individual words such as personal names or place names with Spanish or English phonology, and the stress pattern of compound words, a prosodic feature described by Penfield (1984, 1989) and Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia (1985) as a particularly salient characteristic of "Chicano English." Rather than taking the approach of focusing my analysis on a description of the languages or dialects they speak, I decided to examine these three aspects of each individual's language use in order to get a better idea some of the linguistic strategies they employ in everyday conversations.

For codeswitching, I examined the types of codeswitching used by each family member in the context of the tape-recorded conversations, as well as in the context of other conversations I observed but did not record. Family members used three main types of codeswitching: intersentential codeswitching, or codeswitching between English and Spanish that occurs in adjacent sentences; intrasentential codeswitching, or codeswitching between English and Spanish that occurs within a single sentence; and codeswitching involving single words. An example of intersentential codeswitching is given in (2a), an example of intrasentential codeswitching is given in (2b), and an example of codeswitching involving single words is given in (2c). In most cases, single word codeswitches involved a Spanish word being used in an English sentence.

(2) a. Intersentential codeswitching

1	P2:	course my dad said go get the chicken I come back two hours later (laughing)
2	C3,C1:	(laugh)
3		what took you? (laughing)
4	C3:	(laughs)
5	P2:	course
6	P2:	I went all over you know
7		here and there and
8		cruisin around
9		took the long route
10	C1	(laughs)
11	C3:	long long route
12	C1:	ay

13 P1: and and your father's over here
14 **ahorita viene**
he's coming right away
15 **ahorita viene**
he's coming right away

b. Intrasentential codeswitching

1 G1: yeah **R fue** in a hurry
yeah R was in a hurry
2 but she ate
3 cookies
4 **cuando llegamos ella iba saliendo ya porque** she was gonna catch the airpláne
when we arrived she was already leaving because she was gonna catch the airplane
5 uh huh
6 yeah **sí** iba
yeah yes she was going

c. Codeswitching involving single words

1 P2: it reminded me
2 it looks like a a Mexican family band you know?
3 and they had a lot of people on the
4 and they were good and [they did like the
5 G2: [are they called the Jets?
6 P2: the Jets and they did like the Jackson Five you know they would
7 G2: mm hm
8 P2: they were very energetic
9 and so
10 then about
11 what about
12 C1: [**chavalos**
children
13 P2: [you guys
14 huh?
15 [they sh-
16 C1: [they were **chavalos**
they were children
17 P2: yeah they were young
18 and they were
19 but they were good

It is important to note that there is much debate in the codeswitching literature as to whether or not "single word

codeswitches" actually represent instances of borrowing rather than codeswitching (see, for example, Myers-Scotton 1993a, 1993b; Poplack and Sankoff 1988; Poplack et al., 1988). However, the relevant issue in this paper is not whether or not "single word codeswitches" are in fact codeswitches, but that the use of single Spanish words in otherwise English sentences is an important aspect of family members' linguistic behavior.

Examples of the pronunciation of individual words with Spanish or English phonology are given in (3). An example in which a Spanish place name was pronounced with Spanish phonology is given in (3a), and an example in which another Spanish place name was pronounced with English phonology is given in (3b).

(3) a. Pronunciation of individual words with Spanish phonology

1	P2:	that's probably one of the hardest exits to get off
2		cause you got all the people that are going into **Juárez** and
3		so forth
4	C1:	yeah

b. Pronunciation of individual words with English phonology

1	P2:	I told him you were gonna graduate
2		and he says
3		he says well have him give me a call
4		we can talk over the phone I can give you a phone number
5	C1:	is he in L.A. [or is he in El Paso?
6	P2:	[no he's here now in El Paso he moved

The pronunciation of individual words with Spanish phonology in otherwise English sentences can also be called "phonological codeswitching." That is, it can also be analyzed as codeswitching at the phonemic level, or at the level of pronunciation. As with codeswitching involving single words, there is some controversy as to whether or not this phenomenon in fact constitutes codeswitching. Again, however, the relevant issue for this paper is not whether or not the pronunciation of individual words with Spanish phonology constitutes codeswitching, but that it is an important aspect of family members' linguistic behavior. In this study, I chose to analyze it separately. I examined the pronunciation of words such as personal names and place names, other proper names such as street names or names of businesses, and names of food that can be pronounced with either Spanish or English phonology. These words included words or names that are part of both the Spanish language and the English language, like "David," and Spanish words or names that can be pronounced with either Spanish or English phonology, like "María."

For each speaker, of the words that could be pronounced with either Spanish or English phonology, I counted the number that were pronounced with Spanish phonology and the number that

were pronounced with English phonology. Sometimes, my subjects pronounced some words with a kind of "in-between" pronunciation. By this I mean that the speaker's pronunciation approached what I would call a "Spanish" pronunciation but was still somewhere in between a completely "Spanish" pronunciation and a completely "English" pronunciation. This happened with all of the family members, but to a somewhat greater extent with the children. In my analysis, I classified these "in-between" pronunciations as "Spanish" pronunciations.[4] After counting the number of words that were pronounced with Spanish phonology and the number that were pronounced with English phonology, I then calculated the percentage of words each speaker pronounced with Spanish phonology. In addition, as another way of relativizing the data, I also calculated the percentage of words each speaker pronounced with Spanish phonology, excluding multiple instances of the same word.

[4] I classified these "in-between" pronunciations as "Spanish" pronunciations because they occurred in English sentences. In this context, the fact that speakers approached a "Spanish" pronunciation seemed most relevant (and salient). If the situation were reversed and I were examining "in-between" pronunciations that occurred in Spanish sentences, I would probably classify them as "English" pronunciations.

An example of a compound pronounced with the main stress on the second word of the compound, the stress pattern associated with "Chicano English," is given in (4a), and an example of several compounds pronounced with the main stress on the first word of the compound, the stress pattern associated with "Standard English," is given in (4b).

(4) a. "Chicano English" main stress

1	G1:	and they cou- can't find the bus dríver
2	C1:	they can't find him?
3	G1:	na ah
4	ARD:	do they know who it is but they can't find him?
5	G1:	no
6	ARD:	oh gosh
7	C1:	sheesh
8	G1:	he's on the loose (laughs)

b. "Standard English" main stress

1	G1:	it's very good for your cholesterol
2	ARD:	yeah
3	G1:	your the oátmeal

For each speaker, I counted the number of compounds pronounced with the "Chicano English" stress pattern and the number pronounced with the "Standard English" stress pattern. In some cases, especially with compounds produced by the grandparents, it was not clear to me where the main stress of the compound word fell. I counted these words separately. As I did when I looked at

whether words were pronounced with Spanish or English phonology, I then calculated two percentage figures for each speaker: the percentage of compounds produced with the "Chicano English" stress pattern, and the same percentage, not including multiple instances of the same word.

4. Results: Use of Linguistic Resources

The table in (5) shows the types of codeswitching used by the individual family members in my study, and the relative frequency with which these types of codeswitching occurred.

(5) Codeswitching

Subject	Types of codeswitching
G1 (grandmother)	intersentential, intrasentential, single words (frequent)
G2 (grandmother)	intersentential, intrasentential, single words (frequent)
G3 (grandfather)	intersentential, intrasentential, single words (frequent)
P1 (mother)	intersentential, intrasentential, single words (less frequent)
P2 (father)	intersentential, intrasentential(?), single words (less frequent than the mother)
C1 (son)	intersentential, single words (occasional)
C2 (son)	intersentential, single words (occasional)
C3 (daughter)	intersentential, single words (occasional)

As the table in (5) illustrates, within the family, there exist at least three different patterns of language use with respect to codeswitching, which can be correlated with generation. All three grandparents frequently engage in intersentential and

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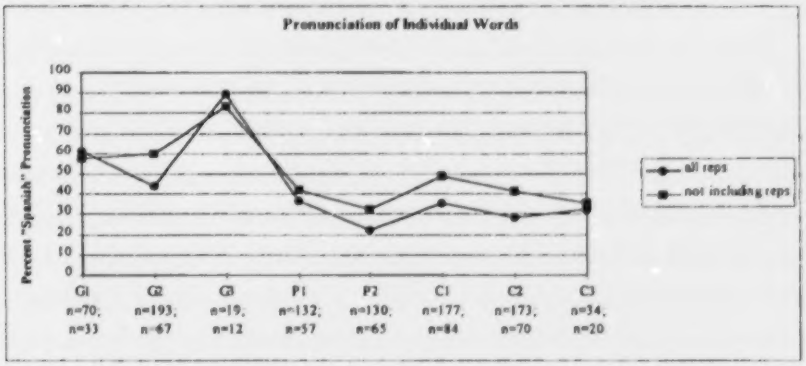
intrasentential codeswitching, as well as single word codeswitches. Like the grandparents, the mother engages in all three types of codeswitching, though less frequently than the grandparents. In the conversations I recorded, the father made use of intersentential and single word codeswitches, but not intrasentential codeswitches. However, based on my observations, I do not believe that this means that he never codeswitches intrasententially, just that he never did so in the conversations I recorded. In both the tape-recorded conversations and in other conversations I have observed, though, I have noted that he codeswitches less than the mother does, especially in conversations involving the children. In the conversations I recorded, none of the three children codeswitched intrasententially and only one child, the daughter, codeswitched intersententially, briefly in one interaction with her father. However, the table in (5) reflects the fact that in other conversations, I have also observed the other two children to codeswitch intersententially, though only occasionally. All three children use at least a small number of single word switches.

The graph in (6) gives the results of my analysis of the pronunciation of individual words such as personal names or place

names that can be pronounced with either Spanish or English phonology.

(6) Pronunciation of individual words with Spanish phonology



The numbers at the bottom of the graph refer to the total number of words I analyzed for each speaker. The first number is the total number of words analyzed for each speaker, and the second number is the number of words analyzed for each speaker, not including multiple instances of the same word.[5]

As far as the pronunciation of individual words is concerned, the grandparents tended to pronounce the most words with Spanish phonology, though to differing degrees. Interestingly, while one might have expected the grandparents, as non-native

[5] As the totals make clear, the number of tokens that occurred in the tape-recorded conversations often differed considerably from speaker to speaker; this is one of the limitations I encountered in analyzing conversational data.

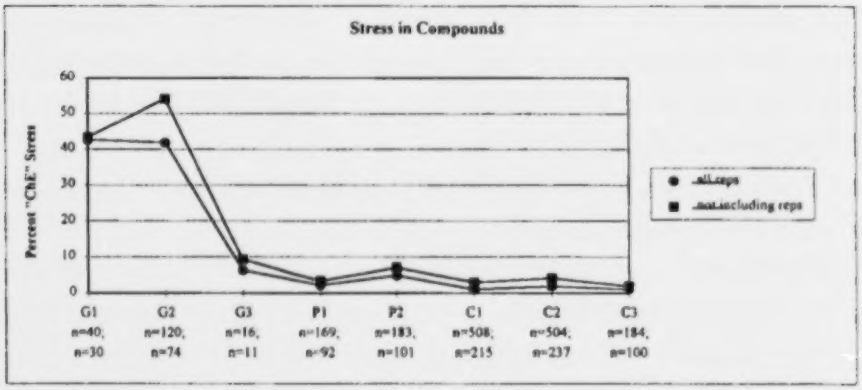
speakers of English, to pronounce close to 100% of words that could be pronounced with either Spanish or English phonology with Spanish phonology, the two grandmothers clearly do not do this. Only the grandfather comes close to pronouncing 100% of possible words with Spanish phonology.

Not surprisingly, the parents and children pronounced a smaller percentage of possible words with Spanish phonology than the grandparents did. Nevertheless, with between 20 and 50% of possible words pronounced with Spanish phonology, depending on the speaker and how the percentage was calculated, the pronunciation of individual words with Spanish phonology appears to be an important linguistic strategy they make use of in conversations with family members and close friends. Again, it is interesting to note that, contrary to what one might have expected, the percentage of words the parents and children pronounced with Spanish phonology doesn't seem to be correlated with the parent/child generational distinction. In fact, it was the father who consistently pronounced the lowest percentage of possible words with Spanish phonology.

The graph in (7) gives the results of my analysis of the stress pattern of compound words, showing the percentage of

compounds each family member produced with the stress pattern associated with "Chicano English."

(7) Stress pattern of compound words



As the graph in (7) illustrates, the two grandmothers were the only family members who produced compounds with the stress pattern associated with "Chicano English" to any great extent, pronouncing approximately 40 to 55% of compounds with this stress pattern. In contrast, less than 10% of the grandfather's compounds were pronounced with the "Chicano English" stress pattern. However, this percentage was still higher than that for any of the other family members.

The other family members pronounced a very low percentage of compounds with the "Chicano English" stress pattern. In fact, with the possible exception of the father, I would

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suggest that this stress pattern is not a linguistic resource the parents and children make use of. I would attribute the low percentage of compounds with main stress on the second word of the compound in their speech not to their use of the "Chicano English" stress pattern but to the inherent variability of language. That is, I would not expect anyone, regardless of the languages or dialects they speak or are exposed to, to pronounce 100% of compounds one way. To test this assumption, I examined the stress pattern of the compounds that I, as a non-Mexican American without much exposure to "Chicano English," produced in the context of the tape-recorded conversations I took part in. I found that, similar to the parents and children, I pronounced approximately 2% of my compounds with the main stress on the second word of the compound.

5. Discussion

The table in (8) summarizes the results of my examination of the linguistic behavior of my subjects with respect to codeswitching, the pronunciation of individual words such as

personal names and place names, and the stress pattern of compound words.

(8) Summary

	Types of codeswitching	Spanish pronunciation	"ChE" stress
G1 (grandmother)	inter/intrasentential, single words (frequent)	61% (58%)*	43% (43%)
G2 (grandmother)	inter/intrasentential, single words (frequent)	44% (60%)	42% (54%)
G3 (grandfather)	inter/intrasentential, single words (frequent)	90% (83%)	6% (9%)
P1 (mother)	inter/intrasentential, single words (less frequent)	36% (42%)	2% (3%)
P2 (father)	inter/intrasentential(?), single words (less frequent than mother)	22% (32%)	5% (7%)
C1 (son)	intersentential, single words (occasional)	35% (49%)	1% (3%)
C2 (son)	intersentential, single words (occasional)	28% (41%)	2% (4%)
C3 (son)	intersentential, single words (occasional)	32% (35%)	1% (2%)

*Percentages in parentheses do not include multiple repetitions of the same word.

As the table in (8) illustrates, it is clear that within this family there exist distinct patterns of language use, or distinct patterns with respect to some of the linguistic resources individual speakers make use of in conversations with family members and close friends. The patterns of language use I have discussed in this paper are not unusual, and are probably familiar to most people with some knowledge of Mexican American language use. My purpose

in describing aspects of these family members' language use was not to show that they are unusual, however, but rather to highlight the range of linguistic behaviors found even within this small, close-knit group of people.

Within this family, it is evident that individual speakers are exposed to a variety of linguistic norms, ranging from those associated more closely with "Standard English" to those associated more closely with "Chicano English" and those associated more closely with "Spanish." Individual family members differ as to how closely they approximate these norms, or as to how much use they make of the linguistic resources available to them associated with these norms. However, it is clear that even those family members who make use of few if any linguistic behaviors associated with "Chicano English" or "Spanish" nevertheless distinguish themselves linguistically from non-Mexican Americans. This is demonstrated by the children's pronunciation of a relatively high percentage of words like personal names and place names with Spanish phonology and by their occasional use of single word and intersentential codeswitches.

My research complements that of scholars such as Baugh (1984) and Santa Ana (1993), who each describe the linguistic situation of Mexican Americans in terms of various linguistic continua, such as the continuum from Chicano Spanish to Standard Spanish and the continuum from Vernacular Chicano English to Standard English, along which individual speakers would be found. While these researchers focused their discussions of Mexican American language on languages and dialects, or on overall populations of language and dialect speakers, in this paper, I focus on individual speakers and their linguistic practices.

Following Le Page (1980) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), I believe that the linguistic behavior of the family members in my study can best be understood in terms of a "multidimensional sociolinguistic space" (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985:14) rather than a linear continuum. That is, I do not see their linguistic behavior as representing points on or movement along a single continuum. Rather, I see their linguistic behavior as reflective of the continuously changing relationship between the aspects of their social identity that they wish to express and the linguistic resources that are available to them and that they make use of to express these aspects of their social identity. As I stated at

the outset of this paper, I consider the conscious or unconscious linguistic choices made by the speakers in my study to be "acts of identity" and the linguistic behaviors I have described to be resources they can draw upon, to differing degrees and in different ways, to express aspects of their social identity.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have described the range of linguistic behaviors found within three generations of a middle-class, primarily English-dominant Mexican American family from El Paso, Texas. I have examined several aspects of this family's language use, including codeswitching, the pronunciation of individual words such as personal names and place names, and the stress pattern of compound words. I have shown that within this family, there exist a variety of linguistic norms and that individual family members differ as to how closely they approximate these norms. In addition, following Le Page (1980) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), I have suggested that the linguistic behavior of the speakers in my study can best be understood in terms of a "multidimensional sociolinguistic space," and I have emphasized the importance of focusing on individual speakers and

their linguistic practices in order to better understand some of the ways in which they construct their identities through language.

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